

Alexandra M Patterson. Teen Library Usage in Orange County, North Carolina: A Pilot Study. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. April 7, 2014. 28 pages. Advisor: Mary Grace Flaherty

This study describes a survey of teens in Girl Scout, Boy Scout and Teen Advisory Board groups in Orange County, North Carolina. The study was conducted to determine key trends in teen library usage. Forty usable surveys were collected from three troops and one teen advisory board.

The study found that all teens surveyed held library cards, most from a young age. While a review of the literature suggests a need for elaborate programming, teen participants used the library primarily to check out books or to read. Demographic factors in Orange County, NC, may account for these differences.

Headings:

Public libraries -- services to teenagers

Library surveys

Young adults and libraries

Teenagers -- books & reading

TEEN LIBRARY USAGE IN ORANGE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA: A PILOT
STUDY

by
Alexandra M. Patterson

A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
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for the degree of Master of Science in
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Approved by

Mary Grace Flaherty

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Background

Librarians are increasingly including services and programming into the public library geared towards young adults to expand the patronage of libraries. Young adults require different services than other populations because of their unique attributes. Long thought of by some as an undesirable population in the library, teens are more frequently being seen by librarians as a new way to increase library usage.

Teens comprise nearly 25% of all library users (Jones 2002). This essential group of library users is often forgotten in libraries who seek to serve adults, children and the elderly. By focusing on what teens want from libraries, this research seeks to gain a better understanding of how libraries can appeal to teens.

While research has been completed examining teen interests and teen assessment of library programs, none have been completed in the Orange County, NC library system. Additionally, past studies have focused on the design or collection development aspects of the library but few have looked at usage overall. None of these that examined usage patterns were done in the past five years.

The purpose of this study is to examine the motivations of young adults on the use of public libraries. The research intends to answer the following questions: Why do young adults choose to use the public library? What factors influence their library usage?

Literature Review

Information about Teens

Teens spend their time in a variety of ways. According to the American Time Use Survey (2012) teens aged 15-19 spend only 16 percent of an hour and 12 percent of a weekend hour reading. This amounts to just over an hour per week reading. When compared to more than seven hours spent on computers, it is clear that internet and computer use is important to teens. According to a 2011 survey by Pew Internet and American Life Project, 95 percent of teens have access to the internet; 80 percent of them use the internet to connect with their friends using social media; and 74 percent of teens have access to the internet on a mobile device such as a smart phone or tablet.

Barnett et al (2008) found when internet time and television time are combined that 52 percent of boys and 26 percent of girls reported average total screen-time levels above 42 hours per week. Outside of time spent in front of a screen, students spend on average four hours a week on homework (Juster, Ono & Stafford, 2004); additionally teens aged 12-17 without at home internet access used computers for forty minutes a week, versus the five hours a week that those with internet access spent on the computer.

Teen Library Use

Teen attitudes toward the library have an impact on their use of the library. Howard's survey (2011) of 249 Canadian students in seventh through ninth grades examined attitudes toward the public library. By surveying students, Howard found that while only 18.5 percent of teens visited the library weekly, 82.6 percent had visited in the past year. The survey was not able to identify a single underlying reason for teens' lack of regular library use, though 47 percent indicated that the library did not offer programs that appealed to them. They also indicated that they did not feel that it was the librarian's job to recommend books, and that the library loan periods were too short for adequate reading time.

The purpose of this research is to explore the individual factors that have an impact on teen use of libraries. In a large-scale study, researchers at the University of Buffalo studied students in fifth through twelfth grades through surveys of parents and their teens (D'Elia, Abbas, Bishop, Jacobs & Rodger, 2007). They found that 85.8 percent of students used the internet from home in the past year, in contrast with 24.7 percent who used the internet at the library and 58.5 percent who used the internet at their school library media center over the same time period. Only 5.4 percent of students accessed the internet at the public library once a week. School library media centers were used more frequently with 14.5 percent of students accessing the internet there weekly. D'Elia et al. (2007) determined that this figure did not significantly differ from those who did not have access to the internet at home.

The same study found that 69.5 percent of students had visited the library in the past year. Of these students, statistically significant demographic differences were found

with a larger number of females, Asian, white and Native Americans frequenting the library than males, African Americans, Hispanics and mixed race youth. Students who did visit the library used it primarily for school-related activities (37.6 percent) (D’Elia et al, 2007).

Agosto (2011) indicated an interesting distinction between school library use and public library use: 69.1 percent of survey respondents visited the public library once a week versus 17.5 percent who visited their school library during the same period. This study also indicated that most teens viewed the library as an information gateway (85 percent) using the library to find information for personal and educational use.

What are libraries for?

There are differing views about the role of the public library for teens. There has been a recent shift towards giving teens a place to hang out after school, turning the library into the “third-space” (Bernier, 2009). According to Bishop (2002), the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development has charged libraries with “[forming] partnerships with other organizations in order to provide safe places and high-quality programs for all adolescents out of school hours” (Bishop,37).

The integration of technology into library programs is key in attracting teens (Hill, 2010). One way that some libraries have increased their technology offerings is by hosting gaming events.

Implementing gaming programming in the library has gone a long way to attracting teens via the tech bandwagon. In ALA's National Gaming Day

program for 2009, 1,365 libraries throughout the United States participated with a total of 31,296 players participating.

But gaming isn't the only new technology in which teens are interested. As Hill (2010) notes social media is a key way to attract teens to the library, "Added tech tools are just another delivery method for providing core library services...If we are looking to the future, we need to be thinking about pure digital format and how the library can be the intermediary for that." Integrating technologies, such as gaming and social media, can help libraries not only to reach teens and bring them into the library but also to showcase library services in the digital age.

Characteristics of Orange County, NC

Orange County has an estimated 2012 population of 137, 941, 20.4% of whom are under the age of eighteen (U.S. Census Bureau. 2014, January 12). The population is mostly white (77.4%) with the largest minority group being African Americans. Most of those living in Orange County have earned a high school diploma (90.5%); this figure is significantly higher than the state and national averages of 84.1% and 85.4% for high school diploma rates (U.S. Census Bureau. 2014, January 14). Additionally, roughly half of the population has received a bachelor's degree (55.5%), compared to 26.2% statewide.

Orange County, NC Library System

According to a recent Community Needs Analysis, residents in Orange County overwhelmingly have access to the internet at home (98.5%) (Chow, 2012). The high

access to internet does not stop internet and computer usage at the public library, according to a year-long observation. The Orange County Library has three locations, the main library in downtown Hillsborough, the Carrboro Branch Library located in McDougle Middle School and the Cybrary in the Carrboro Century Center.

Methodology

In order to learn more about the library habits and preferences of teenagers, a written survey was designed and administered to sixth through twelfth grade participants in Girl Scout, Boy Scout and Teen Advisory Board groups. These groups were selected for this pilot study because they were readily available.

The initial study group was members of the Teen Advisory Board at the Orange County Public Library. Parental consent was obtained. After a short explanation of the project was given, teens were asked to sign an assent form. Once the assent forms were collected from all who chose to participate, the survey itself was passed out. Surveys were returned to an envelope provided. Seven participants were surveyed at the Orange County Teen Advisory Board, all of whom had parental consent.

A similar procedure was followed at the three Girl Scout and one Boy Scout troop meetings. Consent forms were distributed to parents in a packet explaining the project prior to the meeting. At the beginning of the meeting, a brief overview of the project was given to the teens. Teens then had the opportunity to sign an assent form and complete a survey. Surveys were matched with parental and teen consent forms for the purposes of determining consent and then separated so that anonymity could be maintained.

In order to explore teen library preferences, teens were encouraged to write in additional answers and to explain anything they felt was unclear. The surveys were

administered in small groups of roughly 7-15 participants. To protect the privacy of the participants, each participant was identified on the survey by a randomly assigned number and asked merely to indicate his or her grade level and gender on the survey itself.

The survey approach was chosen because it was the most efficient way to learn about the habits and preferences of teens. Surveys can ask a variety of questions, some with forced-choice responses, which can be coded and analyzed. This method was also chosen because it allowed the teens to respond directly about their preferences, rather than the study making assumptions based on data about circulation or program attendance. Additionally, the survey allowed for anonymity which would enable teens to be more open by offering the participants more anonymity than a formal interview would have allowed.

Though only high school students fall firmly into the teen category, the study was expanded to look at sixth through twelfth graders. Most of those who attend teen library programs at the Orange County Public Library fall into the preteen category. In order to evaluate library attitudes for this group, it was necessary to expand the potential pool of participants to include a wider range of ages.

The survey (Appendix A) consisted of nine questions. Two questions addressed demographic data: grade level and gender. The third question asked whether participants knew the location of the public library. Those who did not know were asked to end the survey there. Additional questions addressed the frequency with which participants

visited the public library, and some were aimed at understanding why participants choose to use library services. The remaining questions asked about library cards in an attempt to see if library card registration age had an effect on library usage.

A variety of methods were employed to analyze the survey results. Individual responses were compiled into a spreadsheet that allowed for identification of key trends within the responses. After compiling the results for the group as a whole, results by gender, survey location, and grade level, were examined to see if any of the trends could be attributed or linked to a particular grade level or gender.

Results

Of the 43 surveys distributed, 43 were returned but three were without parental consent forms. These three surveys were not tabulated and were destroyed. A total of 40 surveys were eligible for analysis.

Even numbers of surveys from male and female participants were collected. Surveys from males were collected at a single Boy Scout Troop meeting and at a Teen Advisory Board meeting, while the surveys from females were collected at two separate Girl Scout Troops and the Teen Advisory Board Meeting (Figure 1).

Those who responded to the survey were primarily young teens; 90% were in middle school which is identified as sixth, seventh or eighth grade (Table 1).

Figure 1. Origin of Survey Participants

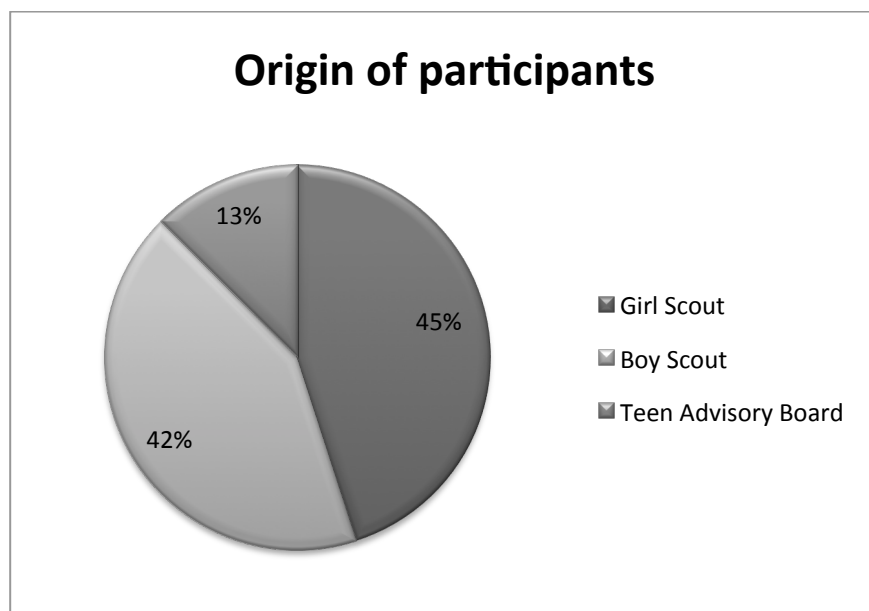
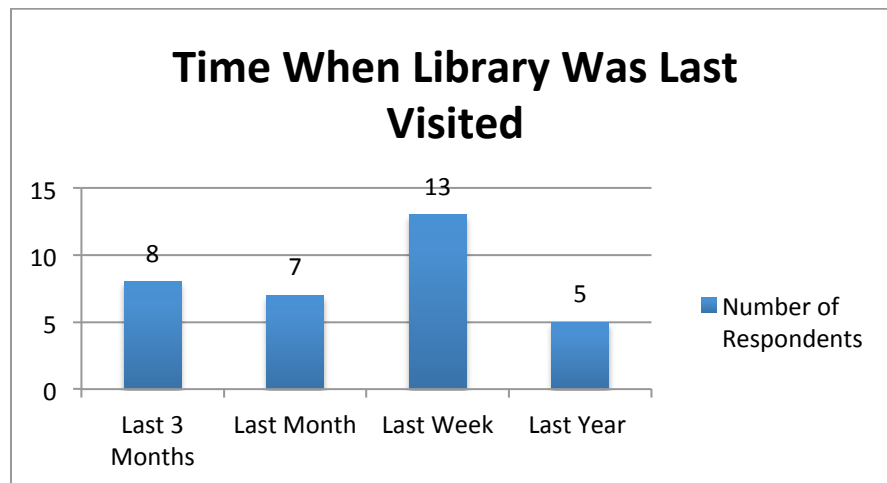


Table 1. Distribution of Respondent Grade Levels

Sixth	Seventh	Eighth	Ninth	Tenth	Eleventh
13	8	15	2	1	1

All respondents indicated that they knew where their local public library was located and thus filled out the entire survey (see Appendix A, question three). All respondents had visited their libraries fairly recently. Nearly half of the teens responded that they had been to the library within the past week (42.5%, n=13) (Figure 2).

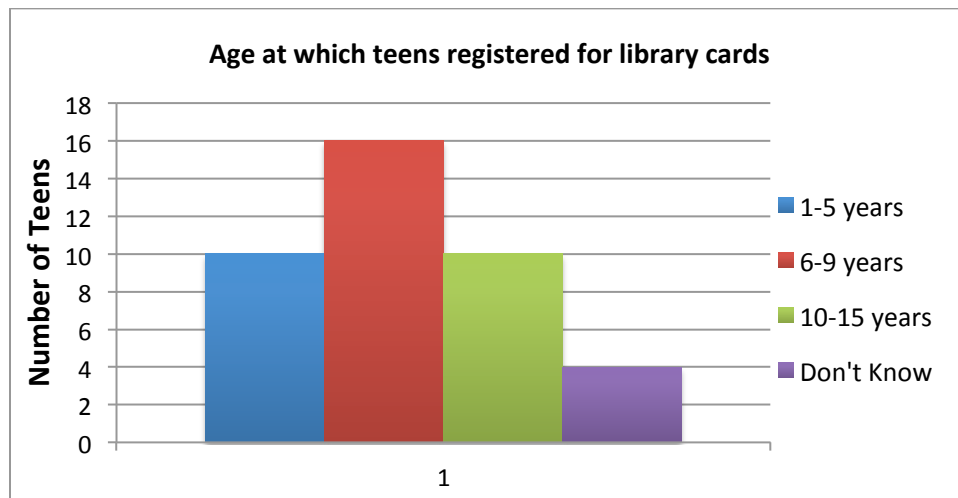
The rest of the teens were almost evenly split between having visited the library in the past month, the past three months and the past year. No teens indicated that they had been to the library in the past two years. Seven respondents did not answer the question. These categories were separate and discrete.

Figure 2.

Nearly all respondents (95%) indicated that they had registered for a library card (Appendix A, question 8). The ages at which teens obtained cards were widely varied, but most teens could identify the age range at which they had registered (Figure 3). Forty

percent of teens registered for cards when they were 6-9 years old (n=16), 25 percent when they were 1-5 years (n=9) and 10-15 years (n=10), and 10 percent did not know when they had obtained a library card (n=5).

Figure 3.



Older Teens

Although there weren't significant differences between age groups, results for teens in ninth through twelfth grades were analyzed. All older teens had visited the library within the past month; contrary to evidence that library usage drops off during the teen years.

Library Services

Horn (2011) argues that teens who frequent the library are not necessarily using it for its books. This did not hold true with this survey population. All those who knew where their library was located indicated that they used the library to check out books. Of

those 40 who used the library to check out books, 24 read while at the library. This is nearly double those who visit the library to use the internet (15 respondents).

The other most popular activity completed at the library was homework (13 respondents). Among the other reasons for using the library, borrowing music (n=2) and gaming (n=1) were mentioned.

Though most of the available literature focuses on bringing teens into the library for programs or on the importance of crafting good programs, of the teens I surveyed only six of forty teens visited the library for this purpose. Those six who attend programs at the library, appear to be “heavy users” and were respondents from the Teen Advisory Board. All have visited the library in the past week and noted they used every library service mentioned.

Discussion

The surveys collected from Orange County, NC teens revealed interesting characteristics about this small population. The teens all held a library card from a fairly young age and 35 of the 40 respondents had visited the library in the past month. It is important to note that 13% of the surveys were collected while at the public library. The teens surveyed seem to use the library for reading more often than conventional wisdom would dictate. It is important to note that teens who live in Orange County, NC might be demographically different from those in other areas. The small population of minorities in Orange County, or the increased high school graduation rate could have skewed the results.

Though every effort was made to standardize responses, there were different interpretations of various questions. While filling out the survey, teens had unanticipated confusion regarding the nature of the questions. They wanted the ability to answer questions more specifically, especially question 9 (see Appendix A). Teens also asked what owning a public library card meant. They suggested that using a parent's card or a friend's card seemed like ownership to them. Because these questions could change the outcome of the survey if answered differently each time, answers were noted and delivered the same way in subsequent administration sessions.

Additionally, several respondents wrote in answers that contradicted the way they answered certain questions. For instance, respondent 35 added when answering number 9, "If you do hold a public library card, when did you first register for a card?", that she

thought she registered for a card “when [she] was 4” but circled the 6-9 years old choice. The other case was with question 6 “What services do you use? (check all that apply)” when respondent 38 failed to check the blank next to “Check out books” but wrote in “check out books” in the other reasons section.

There was often an illuminating discussion as the survey was passed out. One participant from the teen advisory board seemed confused that anyone would not know where the public library was while another from a Girl Scout troop couldn’t imagine why anyone would visit the public library. These side comments provided an interesting background for understanding survey data.

this survey study had an unusually high response rate. Teen civic clubs, such as Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops as well as Teen Advisory Boards, seem a good place for soliciting teen participation with parental consent. In the course of this study, it became clear that these locations were ones where teens readily interacted with their parents and were willing to participate in survey research.

Teens who took part in this study were heavier library users than previous studies would suggest and choose to use the library for different purposes. Rather than turning to technology or programming within the library, all teens used the library to check out books. This increased use of traditional library services suggests that a focus on collection development and book displays may serve teen needs more effectively than other measures.

It is notable that teens did not indicate that they used the library for internet or computer purposes. 98.5 percent of Orange County households have internet access, so the teens may be doing their internet research elsewhere. Additionally, there is an 1:1

initiative in the Orange County, NC schools which provides laptops to students (Veitch, 2013). Access to the internet and a personal laptop may be the reasons that teens do not use computer services at the library.

The teens surveyed also did not use the library for homework. This could be attributed to their computer and internet access, as well as a lack of understanding about available resources. According to librarians at the Orange County Public Library, they do not go into schools to explain library services and to sign students up for library cards. Because teens may think of the library as somewhere to check out books, as all of the survey participants indicated, they may not realize the databases or other resources available to assist them in their schoolwork.

Very few teens indicated that they attended events at the library (n=6). Though this may be due to a lack of marketing in schools, there are other factors that may contribute. Many teen events at the Orange County Public Library occur in the evenings when teens have other regularly scheduled activities such as theater and soccer practice. Teen Advisory Board members commented while filling out the survey that they would not be able to make the next meeting because of various conflicts. Perhaps scheduling activities on alternate nights or on weekends would increase teen attendance.

Limitations of the Study

Many of the questions forced responses using separate and discrete categories. A notable example is question 9 regarding when a library card was first obtained. By providing a continuum or an open-ended question, different answers may have been given. The same is true for question 5 regarding frequency of library use. As discussed

above, some participants had trouble determining into which category they fit. An open-ended question might have provided more precise results.

Though the study was originally devised to see why teens choose to use the library or not use the library, all respondents were library users. This might be due to the population surveyed. Those who participate in evening programs that require transportation, such as Teen Advisory Board and Scouting, have parents who have the ability to transport the teens places. This transportation could contribute to or account for their library usage.

Because I worked with such a small group of individuals in a context that might eliminate non-library users, my results cannot be generalized to draw conclusions about the larger teen population. This project served as a pilot study, which could be expanded to include more participants randomly selected at a variety of locations.

When expanding this pilot study, cognitive interviews would need to be conducted to determine what teens believed each question to mean so that the survey could be adjusted accordingly.

Conclusions

Among the population I surveyed, teen library usage is very high. Though there are many programming and other options for them to participate in, those surveyed indicated that they prefer to use the library for more traditional services. Providing activities that incorporate more of their interests, such as reading and schoolwork, might attract more teens.

Further study will be needed to determine if teens know about the programs and if the programs offered appeal to them. This more in-depth look would enable librarians to market events more effectively or plan events that more teens would attend. Further investigation is also needed to determine if the population surveyed in this study was anomalous in terms of library usage and types of activities performed at the library.

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Appendix A. Survey

1. I am in _____ grade: (Circle one)

Seventh Eighth Ninth Tenth

2. I am a: (circle one)

Girl Boy

3. Do you know where your public library is? (if no, end survey here and turn in)

Yes No

4. Do you ever go to your local public library (circle one):

Yes No

If not, why not? (please describe)

5. When was the last time you went to the library? (circle one)

Last week Last month Last 3 months Last year Last 2 years

6. If you do go to the public library, what services do you use? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Computer/Internet
- ☐ Check out books
- ☐ Work on homework
- ☐ Read
- ☐ Attend programs

Are there other reasons you go to the library? (please describe)

7. If you don't go to the public library, why not?

8. Do you currently own a public library card? (circle one)

Yes No

9. If you do hold a public library card, when did you first register for a card? (circle one):

1-5 years old 6-9 years old 10-15 years old

Older Don't know

Appendix B. Parental Consent Form

University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill

Parental Consent for a Minor Teen to Participate in a Research Study

Title of Study: Teens' Use of Public Libraries

Principal Investigator: Alexandra Patterson

UNC-Chapel Hill Department: School of Library and Information Science

Email Address: patteram@live.unc.edu

Faculty Advisor: Mary Grace Flaherty

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to allow your teen to fill out a survey as part of a research study. Joining the study is voluntary. You may refuse permission, or you may withdraw your permission for your teen to be in the study for any reason, at any point. Permission will also be obtained from your teen.

More information about this study is discussed below. It is important that the information is understood so that you can make an informed decision about your teen taking part in this study. You will be given a copy of the permission form. You and your teen should ask the principal investigator any questions you have about this study.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to explore teen choices to use public library services.

How many people will take part in this study?

If your teen chooses to take part, your teen will be one of approximately 40 people in this research study.

How long will your teen's part in this study last?

The survey should take between 10 and 15 minutes to complete, and there will be no follow-up questions.

What will happen if your teen takes part in the study?

If you and your teen consent, your teen will fill out the survey. Your teen is free to ignore any questions he/she does not wish to answer. The responses will be kept confidential.

What are the possible benefits from the study?

Research is done to gain new knowledge. It is possible that your teen will not benefit directly from this research study, but the findings will contribute to our understanding of public library services for teens.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in the study?

There are no known risks involved in this study.

How will your teen's privacy be protected?

No unique identifiers (e.g. name, email, etc) will be collected. Surveys will be stored separately from consent forms. No one will have access to the survey information. Surveys will be destroyed when the project is completed.

Participants **will not** be identified in any report or publication about this study.

Parent's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily give permission to allow my teen to participate in this research study.

Printed Name of Research Participant (Teen)

Signature of Parent/ Date

Printed Name of Parent

Appendix C. Teen Assent Form

University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill

Teen Assent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of Study: Teens' Use of Public Libraries

Principal Investigator: Alexandra Patterson

UNC-Chapel Hill Department: School of Library and Information Science

Email Address: patteram@live.unc.edu

Faculty Advisor: Mary Grace Flaherty

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to fill out a survey as part of a research study. Joining the study is voluntary. You may refuse permission, or you may withdraw your permission for any reason, at any point. Permission will also be obtained from your parent/guardian.

More information about this study is discussed below. It is important that the information is understood so that you can make an informed decision about taking part in this study. You will be given a copy of the permission form. You should ask the principal investigator any questions you have about this study.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to explore teen choices to use public library services.

How many people will take part in this study?

If you choose to take part, you will be one of approximately 40 people in this research study.

How long will your part in this study last?

The survey should take between 10 and 15 minutes to complete.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you and your parent/guardian consent, you will fill out the survey. You are free to ignore any questions you do not wish to answer. The responses will be kept confidential.

What are the possible benefits from the study?

Research is done to gain new knowledge. It is possible that you will not benefit directly from this research study, but the findings will contribute to our understanding of public library services for teens.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in the study?

There are no known risks involved in this study.

How will your privacy be protected?

No unique identifiers (e.g. name, email, etc) will be collected. Surveys will be stored separately from consent forms. No one will have access to the survey information. Surveys will be destroyed when the project is completed.

Participants **will not** be identified in any report or publication about this study.

Teen's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily give my consent to participate in this research study.

Printed Name of Participant (Teen)

Signature/Date